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District of Arizona*

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HUMAN SMUGGLER GETS 35 YEARS FOR TRANSPORTING ILLEGAL ALIENS RESULTING IN DEATH

TUCSON – JIMIR VALLE MARTINEZ, 23, of Esquila Comayagua, Honduras, was sentenced Monday to 420 months by U.S. District Judge Raner C. Collins. On February 3, 2006, a jury convicted JIMIR VALLE MARTINEZ of all 15 counts in the superseding indictment charging the defendant with conspiracy to bring in and transport illegal aliens resulting in death (Count1); bringing in illegal aliens for profit (Counts 2-8); and transporting illegal aliens for profit and resulting in death (Counts 9-15).

The charges stem from a tragic event on October 16, 2004, in which five people were killed in a crash near Sierra Vista, Arizona. At approximately 10:30 AM, a Cochise County Sheriff's Deputy encountered a white Ford F-350 pick-up truck as it exited a remote desert region South of Sierra Vista. The Ford F-350 proceeded northbound on Arizona State Route 92 towards Sierra Vista. The Sheriff's deputy initiated a mobile surveillance of the Ford F-350, requesting the license plate information from dispatch. The Ford F-350 came back as reported stolen. A traffic stop was subsequently attempted on the pickup truck; however, the driver refused to yield to the sheriff's lights and sirens. As a result of the driver's failure to yield, a multi-agency pursuit was initiated. The Ford F-350 continued northbound on Arizona State Route 92, reaching speeds well in excess of the posted speed limit.

The Ford F-350 turned westbound onto Buffalo Soldier Trail in Sierra Vista. The Ford F-350 continued northbound on Buffalo Soldier Trail Road and arrived at the intersection of Arizona State Route 90 and Buffalo Soldier Trail Road. Law enforcement officers deployed tire deflation devices. As the Ford F-350 proceeded through the intersection of State Route 90 and Buffalo Soldier Trail Road at a high rate of speed, the driver lost control of the Ford F-350 and traveled into oncoming traffic, resulting in a multi-car collision.

Seventeen people were in the Ford F-350, including 11 in the bed of the pick-up truck. As a result of the collision, everyone in the bed of the pick-up truck was ejected and five people, Maria Del Pilar Hernandez-Espinoza, Mauro Guadalupe Macedas-Hernandez, and Eric Sanchez-Dominguez, all citizens of Mexico, and United States Citizens James and Emilia Guthrie Lee, were pronounced dead on the scene. Other individuals received medical attention on the scene and were transported to medical facilities throughout Arizona via helicopter and ambulance. As a result of the collision, occupants, personal effects, and miscellaneous debris were strewn throughout a quarter-mile area along Buffalo Soldier Trail Road and Arizona State Route 90. One occupant, Issac Espejo, was severely injured, and died after returning to Mexico, as a result of his injuries. Another occupant, Arizbeth Barbara Rincon-Esteban, lost her unborn child as a result of her injuries.

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Judge Collins found that Jimir Valle Martinez' conduct was wanton and in complete disregard for human life.

The joint investigation was conducted by agents from the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Douglas office, and officers of the Arizona Department of Public Safety, Sierra Vista office. The prosecution was handled by D. Thomas Ferraro and Jonathan Granoff Assistant U.S. Attorneys, District of Arizona, Tucson.

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